

Christ or Judgment

Hebrews 10:26-31

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It is good to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out a visitor card (either online or by using a card from the pew in front of you). And if you have any questions or concerns about your time with us today, please feel free to pull me aside after worship today.

We are here this morning to honor God and to preach the good news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As we've summarized on the wall up here, we obey the good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. From that point on, it is our honor, our privilege, to live for Jesus. As our tradition has been, we have an example to share this week, and we'll just take a look at one this week, coming to us (once again) from the Lord's church in Honolulu, Hawaii. They posted online a few days ago and they say, "Rejoice church! Mr. Cliff (98 years old) was baptized into Christ. We found a way to immerse him for the forgiveness of his sins. Praise God!" You can see they put an inflatable kiddie pool in the shower at what looks to be a nursing home, and they used a lift to lower Mr. Cliff into the water. Whatever it takes, and it is great to see this. There are many more we could have shared this week, but we've shared this to try to illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we continue in our study of Hebrews! We are in Hebrews 10 this morning, so I would invite you to meet me there in just a moment, but as we make our way to Hebrews 10, I should warn you that today's passage contains one of the most intense and graphic warnings anywhere in scripture. The book of Hebrews, of course, is addressed to some people who were having a hard time listening to Jesus. They were tempted to turn back to a former way of life, and to try to prevent that from happening, the author makes the point throughout the book that "Jesus is Better." For the most part, the encouragement is positive. Last week, for example, we had those three *"let us"* statements, *"let us draw near," "let us hold fast,"* and *"let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."* That's pretty positive! Last week, I think we had a rather encouraging passage. Well, this week we have more of a warning; we have the consequences, as the author explains exactly what will happen if we refuse to do what he just

told us to do in that previous paragraph (in verses 19-25). And it's not good! In fact, it's terrifying! I know there are some who may try to avoid speaking of such things, but here we are. We are working our way through a message from God, and this is obviously something that he wants us to know. It's important, then, that we take some time to hear the warning.

Let's look together, then, at Hebrews 10:26-31. We have the three *"let us"* statements, telling us to draw near, to hold fast, and to encourage each other, and then we have a *"for."* This is what happens if we fail to draw near, hold on, and encourage; this is what happens if we forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:26-31),

²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

As we think about what's been written here and what it means for us, I'd like for us to start by thinking about the problem or the danger (as it's addressed here primarily in verse 26), and then I'd like for us to think about the CONSEQUENCES (addressed throughout the rest of the passage).

- I. **But we start in verse 26 as the author describes a particular DANGER, a PROBLEM, we might say, and the issue here concerns those who "GO ON SINNING WILLFULLY AFTER RECEIVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH."**

One thing that has amazed me in preparing today's lesson is the lengths some people have gone to to try to explain away this idea that God's people can sin in such a way as to eventually be lost. Some are convinced that once you are saved, you are always saved, and there's nothing you can do to change that. And it's a comforting doctrine, I would love to believe it, but it's simply not true. In fact, this struggle of keeping the saved saved is the whole point of the book of Hebrews! And we see it, yet again, right here. Well, some see this passage, and they start in with the mental gymnastics, and they are convinced that this passage, no matter what it says, cannot really mean what it actually says. And so, they try to say that what we've just read this morning doesn't apply to believers, but to unbelievers. And so, to them, this passage is a warning, not to God's people, but to outsiders. One of the big problems with this way of thinking comes down in verse 29, where the author refers to those who are *"sanctified."* Well, if you think this passage only applies to unbelievers, that's a problem, isn't it? Well, some then make the argument that the author must be referring to those who are only sanctified outwardly, that this is a reference to hypocrites, that this is only a reference to those who are faking it. And yet, the word *"sanctified"* is never used this way anywhere else in scripture. There's no such thing as partial sanctification.

But you know, what really does it for me, is how the author starts this passage. Notice: He includes himself here, doesn't he? *"For if WE go on sinning willfully..."* The author, most certainly a faithful Christian (perhaps even an apostle) includes himself in the warning! There was a chance, then, that even he might be in danger of turning back to a life of sin. And so, he includes himself here. And not only that, but if we say that this only applies to unbelievers, then we would also need to rip this passage out of its context. Remember: Leading up

to this paragraph, the author was addressing those who had boldness to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, he was writing to those whose hearts had been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, whose bodies had been washed with pure water, and he was saying (because of this), ***“let us draw near,” “let us hold fast our confession,”*** and ***“let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”*** Everything we looked at last week was written to believers, and there’s nothing to indicate that this changes between verses 25-26. And then, down in verse 30, we have the warning that ***“the Lord will judge His people.”*** Not outsiders (in this context), but ***“His people.”***

So, writing to believers, writing to God’s people, the danger is that ***“we”*** might ***“go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth.”*** Just a few notes here, starting with the reminder that he’s not referring to a one-time sin, or an occasional sin, or even a habitual sin that we may struggle with from time to time, but the danger here is when we ***“go on sinning willfully.”*** This is a decision we make, “I know this is wrong, but I plan on doing it anyway.” As John read for us earlier (from 1 John 1-2), we know that when we sin and struggle and confess, God will forgive. We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. But, if we willingly continue in sin (even though we know better), we have basically rejected God’s final offer.

And another quick note here: This is not a particular sin, but this may be any sin that we ***“go on”*** committing ***“willfully.”*** And we should also note that this comes in the verse immediately after that reference to ***“forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”*** There’s obviously a connection between not assembling together and turning to a life of continual sin. So, this passage is addressed to us, to any of us as God’s people who ***“go on sinning willfully after receiving a knowledge of the truth.”***

II. As we continue with the rest of this paragraph, we come to a series of CONSEQUENCES.

If we choose to continue sinning, even when we know better, what’s next?

A. Well, right away (in verse 26), we’re told that **THERE NO LONGER REMAINS A SACRIFICE FOR SINS.**

Now, this doesn’t mean that the sacrifice of Jesus is any less powerful or effective than it was before, but this simply means that the one who goes on sinning willfully has turned away from God’s best and final offer, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. And if we turn away from Jesus in this way, there is no other option. There is no “Plan B” at this point. If we turn away from Jesus, that’s it. Do we remember how we looked at Jesus as a “better sacrifice” in the first part of this chapter? His blood is better than the blood of bulls and goats, and so on? Well, if we turn away from that, there is nothing more to come. We might compare it to being lost at sea, hundreds of miles from land, and refusing any help from the last in a long line of rescues. If we turn away from the last and final offer from the Coast Guard, that’s not on them; that’s on us. In the same way, if we ***“go on sinning willfully,”*** that’s it, ***“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”***

B. The next consequence of sinning willfully (in verse 27) is that of **“...a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.”**

In Matthew 25, even Jesus warned about those who would be thrown ***“...into the outer darkness,”*** and that ***“...in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** Even Jesus warned that those who refuse to show mercy to the poor, ***“...will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”***

Many try to get around this, suggesting that the fire is merely symbolic. Others suggest that the destruction will only be temporary, that the wicked will simply be annihilated. A year or so ago, we took a few weeks to

study the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16, and we lost a member over that. This person could no longer believe that God would cause anyone to live eternally in torment like that. And yet, the Bible does explain that those who *“go on sinning willfully”* will indeed face *“a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries”* (described elsewhere as *“eternal punishment”*). I don’t know about you, but I can’t dwell on that. I can’t wrap my mind around that. And yet (back in Matthew 25:46), Jesus himself does refer to *“eternal punishment”* right along side *“eternal life.”* As I understand it, the punishment for the wicked will last just as long as the reward for those who are righteous. Again, it is almost impossible to even think about, but we can at least be thankful for the warning.

C. Another aspect of this punishment comes in verses 28-29 as the author explains that THE CONSEQUENCES FOR CONTINUING IN SIN WILL BE MUCH WORSE FOR THOSE OF US LIVING UNDER THE NEW COVENANT AS OPPOSED TO THOSE WHO LIVED UNDER THE OLD.

And it’s almost as if the preacher can anticipate the objection. As he’s preaching, he mentions the *“terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries,”* and he can see the audience thinking, “Wait a minute! I thought we have a better covenant now! Why is it worse now than it was before?” And he answers this here by making a comparison. Yes, the New is better than the Old, he’s just spent ten chapters explaining this, and that’s why the consequences for ignoring it are so intense. Under the Old Law, the worst thing you could do was to sin intentionally, and when you did, you got the death penalty. No mercy! Well, if we do the same thing under the New Covenant, the punishment will be even more severe. Why? Because we’ve *“trampled under foot the Son of God,”* we’ve *“regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant,”* and we have *“insulted [or outraged] the Spirit of grace.”* To go on sinning willingly under the New Covenant is to treat the Son of God like roadkill, to trample his dead body underfoot, to treat his blood as if it is unclean – in other words, to go on sinning willingly is treat Jesus’ blood like the blood of any other criminal that died by crucifixion. And to do so insults (or outrages) the Spirit of grace. Even God’s Holy Spirit is outraged by this. And with this, we have all three parts of the Godhead involved. Any reference to the *“Son”* implies a “Father,” and now we have a reference to the *“Spirit.”* Imagine offering your only Son to save somebody, and imagine that person not only ignoring the offer but stepping on your son’s dead body with no more regard than what we might show for a dead squirrel that’s been flattened out here on Acewood. The rejection of the gift is so offensive, because the gift itself was so valuable to begin with. Sometimes we talk about the punishment fitting the crime; here, the punishment fits the price that was paid so that we could avoid the punishment. If we go on sinning willingly, we insult God to his face.

D. As we come to the end of this passage, let’s also notice that when we go on sinning willfully, we are subject to GOD’S VENGEANCE.

Years ago, I had a discussion with a so-called “Jehovah’s Witness,” and this man made the argument that there is no such thing as hell, because “God is not a God of vengeance,” he said. Those were his exact words, “God is not a God of vengeance.” And yet, here we are, *“For we know Him who said, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.’ And again, ‘THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.’”*³¹ *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* By the way, the man went on to say, “Even YOU wouldn’t torture someone forever, would you?” You need to be very careful asking me who I might be willing to torture forever! But I explained that if I were to offer my only son for somebody and they stomped all over his lifeless body in the street, then, yes, I can see that within the realm of possibility. But we aren’t God. All we have is God’s word, and his word teaches that he will, indeed take *“vengeance.”*

Some might argue: But that's the God of the Old Testament! The God of the New Testament is a God of love! God hasn't changed. Do we realize that Jesus talks more about the terror of hell than anybody else anywhere in scripture? And as we just learned in this passage, God's judgment under the New Covenant is even more severe than it was back then. As it is, we have two options: God has provided his Son as the only way to be saved – we can believe and obey, or we can turn away from it and face God's judgment.

Conclusion:

As we close, I realize this passage isn't one of those "1, 2, 3, 4, this is what we need to do this week" passages. We're getting to the very real and practical application of all of this in next week's passage. But I would close with just a few observations:

- First of all, let's be thankful for the grace of God! God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to die in our place. We don't need to face the wrath of God. Jesus did that for us. So, first of all, let's be thankful God's love and mercy.
- Secondly, let's also realize, though, that the warning we've studied today is for us. This isn't addressed to those heathens out there in the world; no, this is for us. We have the ***"let us draw near,"*** the ***"let us hold fast,"*** and the ***"let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,"*** and then we have the ***"...for if we go on sinning willfully..."*** This warning is for us, and the author even includes himself in this. All of us have the potential for sinning willfully to the point where we no longer have a sacrifice and we face the wrath of God. Let's not go there! And when we find ourselves sinning, let's turn away from it. Struggling with a sin or temptation is not the same as sinning willfully. Even if you struggle with something like same-sex attraction, the temptation is not the sin. And that goes for all sins. The sin is when we give in to it. And we may struggle with that for the rest of our time on this earth, but do not give up the struggle. As John read for us earlier, for those of us who are already children of God, the blood of Jesus will cover our sins if we are willing to turn back to God and confess. He is willing to forgive, over and over again.
- And then a third observation or encouragement this morning: Most of us know people who've turned away, who've given up, so I want to ask us to pray for some people this week and then reach out in some way. Jude says that we are to ***"...have mercy on some, who are doubting,"*** we are to ***"save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."*** If we have any shred of influence with somebody who's continuing in sin, Jude would encourage us to use it.

Next week, let's come back together to wrap up Hebrews 10 with some encouragement to hang in there!

Before Jim leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for Jesus, for sending him into this world to save us, and thank you, Father, for being so patient with us. We are thankful for your grace and for your mercy. This morning, we are especially thankful for the warning that we've been given here in Hebrews. We pray that we would take sin seriously, that we would continue the struggle against sin, and that we would

never give in. You've promised a way of escape from every temptation, and we pray not only for the wisdom to find it but also for the courage to take it.

We come to you today through Jesus, who has saved us from our sins. Lord, come quickly!
AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com